



USAID | PHILIPPINES
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Office of Program Resources Management

(632) 552-9907

Monday, April 14, 2008

“USAID/Philippines does not vouch for the accuracy or the opinions of the articles provided in this press clipping service and assumes no responsibility for their content. Please contact USAID/Philippines at infoph@usaid.gov if you have any questions about USAID programs and projects.”

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

(Education)

Mindanao to get 160 new school rooms

(Source: GMA News TV – 4/14/08)

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Philippines - The US Agency for International Development has partnered with Petron Foundation to construct and rehabilitate more than 160 school rooms in the troubled region of Mindanao.

USAID and Petron agreed to provide US\$ 1.25 million each – or a total of US\$ 2.5 million – to help alleviate classroom shortages and improve access to basic education in Mindanao, home to more than 16 million people.

U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Kristie Kenney and Petron Chairman Nicasio Alcantara signed the agreement on Monday at the Petron Building in Makati City.

"The USAID and Petron Foundation will construct 120 classrooms and rehabilitate an additional 480 classrooms in public elementary schools. The partnership will equip new and refurbished classrooms with water and electricity, an average of 25 school desks each, and teachers' tables and chairs, blackboards, cabinets, fans, clocks, and toilets," the US Embassy said in a statement.

It said the USAID's Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS) project has conducted an assessment on the need for new classrooms in communities in Mindanao based on current and projected enrollment data in relation to the existing number of classrooms.

The EQuALLS assessment has identified areas for construction and rehabilitation across 35 municipalities and four cities in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and Western and Southern Mindanao

Education undersecretary Ramon Bacani has committed to maintain the school buildings after the construction and refurbishment.

The Department of Education topped the list of the government budget recipients with P138 billion allocated as follows: P2 billion for the repair of school buildings, P760 million to cover the backlog of classrooms, and P420 million for school seats and P330 million to hire new teachers.

But while the bulk of the national budget goes to education, it remains inadequate to address the problems crippling the education sector.

Hundreds of teachers last year had walked out of their classes in Sulu, one of five provinces under the ARMM, to protest the DepEd's alleged failure in the ARMM to pay their salaries. But regional education officials insisted the teachers have not been paid because they either not passed the PRC licensure examination or were not qualified.

Sulu has more than 5,000 teachers and about 900 of them are with temporary status serving some 50,000 students in 19 towns.

Teachers here have blamed problems of delayed and missing salaries and contributions to the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) to corruption.

More than P389 million of teachers' contributions to GSIS were allegedly missing and that this has ballooned to over P600 million over the years and yet ARMM continues to deduct insurance premiums from their salaries.

The teachers were asking for a formal Congressional or Senate investigations into the missing GSIS contributions and salaries and jail those who would be found guilty of embezzling funds.

The Public Services Labor Independent Confederation (PSLINK), a national confederation of government employees and their unions and associations, said teachers are among the skilled workers that have joined the exodus of Filipinos leaving for abroad due to the lure of higher pay.

Attracting and retaining competent public school teachers remains a huge problem in the Philippines. Many state teachers are overworked but underpaid.

A public school teacher here only gets around P10,000-P15,000 a month while a Filipino teacher in the United States can earn up to P40,000 or more. Low-paying jobs, deplorable working conditions and lack of opportunities in the country also drive some teachers to become domestic workers or caregivers just so they can work abroad. - **Al Jacinto, GMA News.TV**